

Worried expressions and startled gasps filled a meeting room at the Bannockburn Village Hall during a program on Internet safety aimed at parents of local school children.

"We're going to go home and rip out our computers," said one mother after seeing how easily child predators can find young victims using the Internet.

Brian Bone, an investigator in the Lake County state's attorney's office, displayed how he easily found at least 30 Web pages of Deerfield students between the ages of 16 and 18 on MySpace.com just by filling in a couple of query fields.

Just as many showed up for Libertyville students when he went looking for them. He easily obtained the names of one student's friends, her parents' and the names of pom squad members.

Members of the Bannockburn Police Department and Bannockburn Elementary School, who sponsored the presentation April 6, said younger children are also naively putting personal information out over the Internet and exposing themselves to child predators.

"They don't think about the consequences of putting that online," said Bannockburn Police Lt. Ron Price. "Parents need to know there's a scary side and a dangerous side to the Internet."

Debbie Barnes, Bannockburn Elementary principal, said she feels it's the school's responsibility to educate the children and their parents about the Internet's pitfalls. She sent a letter to parents telling them of Web sites where predators are likely to look for easy victims.

"The only security is adults monitoring their children," she said.

Other schools in the area are also concerned.

The Student Leadership Advisory Board, a group of class presidents from Lake Forest, Highland Park, Stevenson and Vernon Hills high schools that meets regularly with U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, made three public service announcements last week to broadcast on the Comcast cable network in May.

"The messages were simple," said Andrew Adair, senior class president at Stevenson. "The main idea is that teen-agers need to be careful with the information and/or pictures they put out on the Internet, and that parents need to help make sure their children are safe."

Schools in Highland Park and Lake Forest have sent letters to and met with parents to discuss Internet safety. They also bring in police officers to make presentations to students.

"We also try to get information to parents in our biweekly newsletter as relevant," said Kyle Schumacher, principal for Deer Path Middle School in Lake Forest.

Michael Lubelfeld, principal of Elm Place Middle School, said there are safeguards on school computers.